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Learn from history, Malays told

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JOHOR BARU, Thurs. - The pre-independence history of Malays' struggles against the British has proven that by uniting, they can be successful despite facing overwhelming odds.

Deputy Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi delivered this message today while launching the Bahasa Malaysia edition of the book "Imbasan Peristiwa-Peristiwa Sebelum Kemerdekaan Malaya" at the Eden Garden Hotel here.

The original English version of the book "Reflections of Pre-Independence Malaya" was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Putrajaya on June 12.

Abdullah, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, said Malays, in particular the younger generation, could learn the value of unity from the struggles of Umno founder Datuk Onn Jaafar, which is the central theme of the book.

He said Datuk Onn, who galvanised the Malays to unite against the formation of Britain's Malayan Union, should always be remembered as he was the epitome of a true Malay hero, who believed in the use of moderation as a tool of struggle instead of extremism.

"We should remember how Datuk Onn and his peers in the then fledgeling Umno struggled to unite the Malays, who at that time were divided by factional lines drawn by State borders.

"Their sacrifices in uniting our nation during the road to independence should be cherished and reflected on as we face the challenges of the future."

The launching of the book was attended by about 2,000 Umno veterans, Barisan Nasional component party leaders and invited guests.

Also present were Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, State Education Committee chairman Ahmad Zahari Jamil and the book's author Datuk Mohamed Abid.

Mohamed, 61, was born and grew up in Datuk Onn's household. His father Abid Jaafar is the son of Datuk Onn's younger brother Muhammad Jaafar. His grandmother Datin Halimah Hussein married Datuk Onn after his grandfather died in 1919.

He and his mother Normah Abdullah, along with two sisters and a brother stayed in Datuk Onn's house in Johor Baru and Batu Pahat after his father died in 1945.

A businessman by profession, Mohamed is the executive director of TA Enterprise Bhd and TA Properties Sdn Bhd.

He wrote the book based mainly on his recollections during his stay with the Umno founder until the latter's death in 1962.

Among others, the book contains anecdotes and notes which give readers an insight into the atmosphere of the pre-independence period and details of unrecorded facts about the early Umno struggles.

The book also reveals certain elements of Datuk Onn's personal vision which clarifies his decision to leave Umno on Aug 27, 1951 and answers criticism against him.